MISINTEGRATION AND REMIGRATION

TEMPORARY AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

by
TIBOR FRANK

People often define themselves in terms of where they live and came from. They build social structure, codes of behaviour, lore and superstition around their places of residence and origin. Migration is not only essential to physical survival: it is one of the pivots of human culture. And yet, in all the vast literature on immigration, assimilation and ethnicity, *misintegration* and *remigration* are practically unmentioned and then often condescendingly, as a mere hazard of the die.

Recent studies in the history of Austro-Hungarian emigration to America around the end of the 19th century seem to suggest that a fairly significant portion of those entering the United States failed to find what they sought for, had it been the promise of life and liberty or the pursuit of happiness. There were probably as many reasons for coming back from America as there were people who could not stay. To come back was a highly individual decision. Yet it can be argued that a few large forces: economic hardship, interpersonal conflicts, the lack of vital bonds or, very often, the failure to find real communities provided the main motives for the mass remigration from the American shores.

To speak of this movement in terms of masses is by no means an exaggeration. C. A. Macartney put the figure of the Austro-Hungarian immigrants returning after a few years at some 20 – 25% of the sum total of those leaving their native Austria or Hungary in search for religious tolerance, political rights or economic chances. And the number of those setling over was vast. There were roughly about 25.000 people leaving the Monarchy per annum between 1886 and 1895, and the figures kept rising until the beginning of the century when they reached 120.000 by 1903. US immigration statistics also provide astonishing numbers for the years 1898 – 99 to 1912 – 13: 423.000 Slovacks, 402.000 Magyars, 219.000 Germans, 47.000 Roumanians and some 30.000 Serbs are said to have responded to the pledge of the Declaration of Independence from inner Hungary alone, a total of 1.121.000 people in a mere decade and a half.

Contemporary sources, literary, ethnographic, musical, artistic and political, confirm the magnitude and importance of the backward move-

ment. The first decade of the new century produced a whole series of literary evidence to show how deeply impressed Hungarian poets and writers were by the steady streams of not only emigrants but remigrants as well. To corroborate the cautious estimate of Professor Macartney, there is the artistic testimony of authors like Ákos Dutka, Kálmán Mikszáth and Endre Ady. These masters of turn of the century Hungarian prose and poetry faithully portray their historical period by way of artistic imagery and thus, in a specifically concentrated manner, bear out my hypothesis that remigration was by no means an accidental by-path of the great waves of emigration to America but a characteristic pattern typical of at least every fifth or fourth participant of that immense migration from Europe to the New World.

A contemporary and friend of Endre Ady, Ákos Dutka was himself a significant poet who contributed to the success of the anthologies *Holnap* ('Tomorrow', 1908–09) which, in the wake of Ady's own first epoch-making books of verse and together with the then newly launched literary monthly *Nyugat* (West), heralded the emergence of a new Hungarian literature. It was in the *Holnap* anthology that Dutka published his "Two Ships – An Encounter", which he later subtitled "A New York Memory". Himself a homecomer from America, Dutka revoked here an astonishing experience of his own transatlantic voyage, making it in this way one of the central issues of his contribution to the poetry of the *Holnap*. The poem needs little explanation: its powerful imagery helps us to envisage the double drama of emigration and remigration.

Their dark forms emerge: pearly, rippling crests
Upon the Ocean's vast and flat expanse;
They arise from the mysterious depths
Like two steeds, their wavy manes afoam.

On one are those who seek for a new life
Dreaming and yearning, and by West beguiled;
On the other, thousand broken, worn
Whom East, the grey and ancient, has recalled.

In awesome silence the two parties gaze:
– Here we go... – And see, here we return
Prying, misgiving – in mutual reproach
They face each other standing at the masts.

The two galleys glide by heavily;
West lures on and on, and ancient East calls
As one another with compassion hail
Tong-tied the strangers from the Hungarian waste.

Equally telling is a passage from Endre Ady's *Úti levelek* (Letters of Travel), published in 1906. The poet, this time a journalist, travelled to Messina by ship and met, just as did fellow-poet Ákos Dutka, a group of Hungarians returning from America, seemingly not an unfamiliar experience for con-

temporaries. "Between Fiume and Marseille, Malta is the only possible supplier of travellers for the Adria-shipping line. I may well be their only client from Malta to Fiume. Apart from my Hungarian fellows on the front deck, of course. They stand above the stairway. They are looking down on the merry blue sea, swearing. It is real savoury Kecskemét swearing. They sailed with a French ship from South America to Marseille. They'll have it bad back home. That is why they are swearing. But can they go anywhere else? By now, they are fed up with America too. They are coming home. Awaited by Darányi's famine grants of corn."

In the very year of young Ady's epistle, the revered master of Hungarian prose Kálmán Mikszáth published the first version of his probably most famous novel *A Noszty-fiú esete Tóth Marival* (The Case of the Noszty-boy with Mary Tóth). The father of his heroine, Mihály Tóth is a typical Hungarian-American emigrant, who went out to America to make a fortune and succeeded in doing so. Successful and rich, the "American" tycoon is called to the death-bed of his father-in-law back in Hungary and finds out he inherited a piece of vineyard from the old gentleman. Hesitating even to look at his newly acquired estate, he is step-by-step cajoled by his brother-in-law into spending more and more time out in the vineyard. By the end, Tóth decides to stay and become a Hungarian again. "'You're a man, Miska [=Mihály Tóth]!—he [=brother-in-law Velkovics] exclaimed while effusively shaking hands with his friend —, you'll see, though money won't pour into your hand the way it did over there, here life will be a hundred times happier.' 'Well, yes — Mihály Tóth continued, musing —, that's what I believe myself — besides, I shall be able to take charge of my own vineyard.' Velkovics smiled, thinking how odd a creation of God Hungarians were: a piece of inherited vineyard can draw them back from the very end of the world. Though, admittedly, that vineyard is on Somlyó mount. This is how the 'American' returned, and as we have seen he bought the Alsórekettyés estate in Bontó county."

Modern aesthetics and literary criticism, especially the work of György Lukács made it clear that heroes of novels decidedly represent basic human experience simply because they are created to be typical in their psychology and destiny of the great historical forces and social trends of the day. Thus the resettlement of Mihály Tóth in his native Hungary is not a matter of artistic invention but that of the regular experience of author Mikszáth, himself a Member of Parliament and a journalist of deep social insight whose novels reveal a rich fabric of contemporary social and psychological knowledge.

Returning emigrants are presented as characteristic figures by sources other than literary as well. Now a precious sourcebook of Hungarian-American folklore, a *Prayer Book for Hungarian Catholics in America adapted to American Life* was published at Connelsville, Pa., similarly in the year 1906. Among many other prayers of obvious need the booklet contained a "Prayer for a Hungarian family returning to their native land," again testifying to the increasing number of those who decided to return. "Benevolent Father — the prayer run —, who in Thy mercy hast allowed

me to collect the fruits of my long labours for my family, my family and I humbly entreat Thee not to forsake us at this difficult moment when we are setting out on a long and perilous journey; may Thy heavenly angels guard us on our way to the land where we were born, may we get there safe and in good health, may we rejoin our next of kin left behind, and our native village; and may we in our village church exalt upon our knees Thy glory, and praise Thy goodness, with which Thou hast preserved us in the foreign land and hast helped us back to this our native country, Amen" Sources of political history inform us less personally though perhaps more authoritatively that the case of homecomers figured in parliamentary debates just as at special emigration congresses held around the turn of the century, where the matter of homeconing was used, in one way or another, as an argument against leaving the country. The waves of returning emigrants added to the growing problems of man-power seriously heightening misery bred by unemployment. Minutes of bank negotiations give ample evidence concerning the steady growth of land-prices in regions of the country where the number of returning "Americans" with considerable fortune was especially high.

Though the question of remigration is only raised by this paper which is the product of a work-in-progress rather than a finished piece of research, I should like to review some of the most notable motives that prompted hundreds of thousands of people to return to the Habsburg Monarchy. Contemporary sources copiously illustrate a series of typical considerations which induced both families and individuals to embark for the mother country. It is quite evident that economic hardship was reason number one for both going and returning and it also must be made clear that a large portion of those sailing for the United States were willing to stay there for a limited period only and planned their come-back, hopefully prosperous, well in advance. This renders research in this specific field even more difficult, as many of the would-be-Americans had never intended to become Americans proper: they wanted only money to be earned and returned with in order to start a more human life in their native Austria of Hungary. A particular distinction must consequently be made between those who went out to return and those who left to start a new life and made up their mind to come back while already in America. Equally important is the difference between two types of returns: that inspired by mysery or some other unbearable hardship and the other induced by some less obvious, mostly social psychological, discomfort. The examples given here are consequently haphazard in nature and, at this early stage of research, are not intended to do more than illustrate by hitherto available kinds of evidence what in a properly scholarly sense of the word is a taxonomic scheme rather than a thesis proper.

Paradoxically, though fairly naturally, enough, psychiatric case-sheets from the turn of the century are telling sources as to the most obvious of reasons behind home-coming, money. A 21-year-old book-keeper's career-story is typical: he left his solid job at a Nagyvárad solicitor's office "to get a better one in America." He was, however, unsuccessful in find-

ing a permanent job and was easily wasting in beer-houses the small sum he was able to collect. Shaken and pennyless, he returned via Hamburg and Berlin to Budapest where he landed in one of the few state-owned psychiatric hospitals in 1908. Another patient who was diagnosed in a country hospital in 1913 went twice to America to make money but, unsuccessful, he returned. A third psychiatric case tried to make a fortune or at least earn his living three times in America but proved to be a failure all the time. First he went out in 1903 and spent there three and a half years, then again he left in 1911 and 1913, always meeting the same economic problems and never able to keep enough money to survive. This strange and much too neglected group of social historical source-material presents characteristic examples of the financial aspects of the drive behind both leaving for and returning from the United States at the turn of the century. It can only be suspected that the transatlantic experiences gloomily contributed to the mental breakdown of the people concerned.

The noted Hungarian novelist Áron Tamási was himself a returning emigrant and devoted a whole part of his three-volume quasi-autobiography to his American experiences, explaining his own reasons for returning. Tamási's hero Ábel suffers from the lack of a proper job and intimate personal contacts and starts to feel out of sorts. To get to know what to do he decides to consult a black man whom he happens to meet while that is just recovering from an epileptic seizure. "...I put my hands on his shoulder, looked deep into his eyes and said to him: 'Your soul is now pure: tell me than: for what purpose are we in this world?' For a moment the negro's traits stiffened, then suddenly he started laughing and kept repeating: 'Most odd, most odd, most odd.' Then again his face grew stiff, he looked deep into my eyes and said: 'We are in this world with the purpose of being at home somewhere in it.'" The negro departs, and Ábel-Tamási starts pondering on what he was just told. "I followed him with my eyes until I lost him from sight, then I sat down and buried my face im my hands. 'We are in this world with the purpose of being at home somewhere in it' – I repeated to myself. And my heart filled with great universal warmth, my soul with the serenity of happy times, and my eyes with the morning dew. I slowly rose, and said: 'He is right: I shall return without delay to my country, so that I may fell at home somewhere in this world. He is right: we cannot possibly have another purpose in life than to get to know everything as far as possible: the colourful and riddled world, the people in need of forgiveness, the peoples snarling at one another, and when we have gotten to know everything as far as possible, to return to the place where we may feel at home."

Similar must have been the way Alfons Mucha, the famous Czech master of the *art nouveau* of the early 20th century thought of himself. Mucha went to the United States altogether six times between 1904 and 1913. "What I am searching here is neither riches, nor comfort or fame for myself but the chance to become useful for our cause" – he wrote to his sister and brother-in-law during his first visit. He was not willing to settle in the United States and returned to his chosen Paris and, to an ever in-

creasing extent, to his native Bohemia. Most telling is the way Mucha departed from his favourite subject, the female body, when finally returning from America to Europe and started to work for the new Czechoslovakian republic just in the making. He settled over to Prague at the earliest possible moment and was commissioned to plan the first paper money and stamps of the new republic which he executed promptly using patriotic motifs. During the war years he was already busy carrying out his immense project *Slawenepos*, a series of huge paintings on the ancient history of the Slavonic peoples which he succeeded in exhibiting right after the establishment of the new regime in Prague's magnificent *Clementinum*, in 1919. There is hardly a better example to illustrate the search for national identity and national culture than Mucha's career which took him from Hamburg via Paris to the United States only to return finally to Czechoslovakia where he found at last his national roots and, subsequently, his national subjects.

Bohemian national music can also boast of having been incorporated into masterpieces written in America. Antonín Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 "From the New World" (1894) presents striking examples of national nostalgia clearly expressed in the third movement (Scherzo) where the dance motifs on the *furiante* and *sousedská* recall several of Dvořák's earlier compositions including "Two Furiants for Violin" (Op. 42) and, first and foremost, the "Slavonic Dances" of 1878. The maestro's Cello Concerto Op. 104 (1895) refers in terms of musical material to autobiographical details recalling the composer's "Four Songs" in the second movement, thus recreating the image of a loveaffair long past. It is certainly very difficult to argue 'referential' content in musical codes without thorough musicological analysis but with a programist like Dvořák it is not exaggerating to suggest that references to Bohemian national motifs and autobiographical detail in an essentially American context suggest and explicit yearning for the mother country and its left-away culture. Both Symphony No. 9 and the Cello Concerto were deliberately programmed to include obvious references in the central movements to the basic intellectual and emotional bonds of the composer.

Paradigmatic is the example of the poet Ákos Dutka himself, who devoted a whole book of autobiographical prose to his American journey under the title of *The Great Adventure*. Published some forty odd years after, the book contains very rich material as to the intricate pattern of motives behind returning from America. Just before receiving a letter from a friend inviting the author back to Hungary to join the new writers' movement (incidentally, this friend was to become the editor of one of the *Holnap* anthologies), the poet was wondering whether or not New York had anything yet to offer him and he reconstructed his feelings hardly less than half a century after in the following way: "How many more of your countenances . . . are still to be seen, you gigantic city, you enormous garbage heap whose depth are swarming with crowds assembled from everywhere, crowds of adventurers, eternal losers and seekers of new lives? What do I seek among them? This is not my destination. I don't understand their tongue. Their strange

heat and bustle, the seething black torrents of their lives are much to weird and alien. What do I want here? I am carried along by the stream, I wonder and marvel. I have learnt what it is like to be without a shelter, to sit at the Caffé Hungarian at uncle Serly's table among knife-cleaning, gold-washing vagabonds. I have slept at the overnight shelter of the Hungarian House, and have listened to stories of broken millionaires and ambitious fur-hunters alike. What else am I after? Here, nothing. This is not my world. Here the Danse Macabre is swirling around the altar of the Gold-woman. Why dance along? Why be taken along, if I cannot grasp the secret of gold, if I can't see its worth? I'll rather make off."

Social historians left this region of human experience relatively untouched. Small is the number of theoretical concepts hitherto applied to this field. After presenting some of my material empirically, let me, at this early stage, draw one conclusion only, the most paradoxical perhaps. The varied stock of examples I had space enough to present seems to suggest that the more an emigrant attaches him or herself to a "national" subculture, the greater the prospective failure of integration and the danger of what I prefer to term *misintegration* into the local society. To put it in other words, one is supposed to integrate into a new society most smoothly if one is attached to one's own "national" subculture, but then, paradoxically, the final success is most questionable.

NOTES

I am indebted to a few scholarly works and a greater number of original sources, literary, artistic, musical and clinical. Henry Steele Commager's (ed.) *Immigration and American History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961) is still a basic handbook in this field and *A Nation of Immigrants* by John F. Kennedy (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1964) was of equally good use to me. The summary of Joseph Conlin's and Harvey Levenstein's paper on „Food and Assimilation: A Case Study of Italian Immigrants" was stimulating to an extent that I could hardly resist taking over a few phrases at the beginning of my paper. It is a pity that the paper itself was finally left unpresented at the EAAS Conference in Amsterdam, 1980. C. A. Macartney's *The Habsburg Empire 1790–1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) provided important statistics as far as overseas emigration from the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy is concerned (pp. 702n and 727). Jiři Mucha's book on his father *Alfons Mucha*. Meister des Jugendstils (Prag: Artia, 1965) contains excellent material on the American decade and the aftermath (see esp. pp. 193 and 203 for comments and 234–5, 256–57, 265, 267 and 269 for pictures and photos). Jenő Antal Molnár made interesting suggestions in his book on *Smetana–Dvorák* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1967), pp. 240–41, 250–51, concerning Dvořák's American compositions. For American–Hungarian folklore I consulted Dezső Nagy's pioneering *Az amerikás magyarok folklórja* (Folklór Archivum 8, Budapest: MTA Néprajzi Kutató Csoport, 1978), esp. p. 320. For the comment on Georg Lukács see his *The Historical Novel* (Penguin Books, 1969), p. 33. For anti-emigration arguments see De Pottere, Bruno (ed.), *A délvidéki kivándorlási kongresszus tárgyalásai* (Budapest: OMGE, 1903), pp. 30, 73–4, 79, 85–7, 133–34, 202.

Endre Ady's article "Magyarok a hajón" (Hungarians on Board) was originally published in the *Budapesti Napló*, Sept. 22, 1906, and recently republished in Ady Endre *Publicisztikai írásai* (The Journalistic Writings of Endre Ady), Vol. 2 (1905–1907) (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977), pp. 442–43. – Ákos Dutka's poem "Hajók ha találkoznak" was first published by *A Holnap új versei* (New Poems of the Holnap) (Budapest:

Deutsch, 1909), p. 145. Later editions bear the subtitle "Newyorki emlék" and it is possible that the poem had been published in a journal or paper prior to 1909 as well. Dutka's autobiographical *A nagy kaland.* Regényes korrajz a kivándorlás idejéből (The Great Adventure. Novelistic sketch from the time of emigration) was so far published in Hungarian only (Budapest: Magvető, 1959), for the quotation see p. 221, for Sándor Antal's letter pp. 226–27. The birth of the poem quoted is eloquently described on pp. 103–05, in moving detail. – I quoted Kálmán Mikszáth's *A Noszty-fiú esete Tóth Marival* on the basis of an 1954 edition (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó), p. 136. – Áron Tamási's *Ábel Amerikában* is quoted here on the basis of an 1957 edition (Budapest: Ifjúsági Könyvkiadó), pp. 279–80.